Responsible Use and Regulatory Frameworks on Military Drones

Why the UN General Assembly need to address the evolving role of uncrewed systems in disarmament discussions
Identifying drone trends and raising awareness

- Type of drone use worldwide through research papers
- Support legal debates around targeted killings and highlight civilian costs
- Stimulate international debate around export and subsequent use
What are key drone developments in Iraq?

- Staging ground for weaponization of commercial drones by non-state actors that spread quickly into other conflict zones
- **Proxy drone-wars** with long-range military kamikaze **drones** built with civilian components
- Ongoing campaigns around **targeted killings** with armed **drones** by States, with serious **civilian harm** consequences
Weaponization of commercial drones

- Islamic State multi-million dollar R&D, training, acquisition and arming of commercial drones
- Access through world-wide market of buyers and smugglers
- Effectively turning this into ‘poor man’s air force’
- New security challenges for Coalition and Iraqi forces
- Copy of methods by Iraqi armed forces, associated militias and the PKK
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<th>Drone types</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Iraq</th>
<th>Iran</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
<th>Israel</th>
<th>Kurdistan Workers Party, PKK</th>
<th>Populair Mobilisation Units, PMU</th>
<th>Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, ISIS</th>
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<td>(Weaponized) commercial drones</td>
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Targeted Killings Campaign with Armed Drones

- Continues presence of armed drones over northern Iraq targeting suspected Kurdish militants since 2016

- Increasing number of civilians deaths, no legal position given; Iraq government remains largely silent.

- Displacement in areas with ongoing air strikes and fighting between PKK and Turkish government

- Iran using suicide drones and ballistic missiles against Kurdish militant groups, with civilian casualties
Proxy drone wars

- Development of long-range kamikaze drone built with civilian components used by Iran-backed militias against
- Targets inside Iraq (US military bases in Baghdad, Erbil, Al-Asad airbase)
- Iraq used as launch pad of strikes against targets in Syria (US bases), Saudi-Arabia (oil refineries and Royal Palace) and UAE airport
- Effective precision weapons used for creating political pressure / retaliation strikes
Lessons learned from Syria

- Quick learning curve by non-state armed groups on multiple types of use (ISTAR) and kamikaze drones
- Ongoing use and state justification for targeted killings with armed drones
- Drones are key for proxy-wars and impacting regional peace and security
Growing drone use in Central and northern Africa

- Initial use of drones in clandestine extrajudicial killings campaigns by the United States.
- Growing demand from African states for armed drones in counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism strikes.
- Multiple incidents of military drones targeting IDP camps, civilian gatherings and other misidentification leading to civilians’ deaths, e.g. Nigeria, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Mali, Somalia and Sudan.
- Increase use of armed drones in cross-border strikes against suspected militant groups that heighten tensions.
- Growing use of weaponized commercial drones, with support from non-African State and private military companies.

Limited to no debate on export controls, responsible use, compensation and justice to civilian casualties.

Mounting concern and criticism from human rights groups and affected communities that are not addressed.
Uncrewed and Uncontrolled?

Towards international standards:

- In line with several recommendations by UN agencies, UN Special Rapporteurs and UN Secretary General, time is now to address use of drone technologies and for States to clarify their legal position on targeted killings, and outline their broader position on improving export controls on drones.

- Need for multilateral and inclusive process that builds robust, progressive and implementable standards on the use and subsequent exports of military drones and related drone technology to strengthen transparency and accountability.

- Rapid decision needed to establish timeline on political support for establishing a UNGA resolution for development of such international standards.

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